

Rhetoric, not results, at a holography show

By Alan G. Artner

Art critic

THE 1970S HAVE been talked about as a time of possibilities, with radical means suggesting new artistic ends. The first half of the decade saw the rise of video art, and now it seems the day has come for a three-dimensional photo process known as holography.

Gallery 1134, 1134 W. Washington Blvd., currently is holding an international holographic exhibition, accompanied by the usual extravagant claims. "Holography is more than a new dimension. It is a new sense," the gallery literature says. So, as the breathlessly redundant pronouncements continue, "it represents a revolution that shatters every concept and aspect of our traditional representational visual traditions."

From 1947 until 1970, holographic research was done completely within a scientific context. Dr. Dennis Gabor of Scotland first proposed it as a method of improving electron microscopy, though his investigations were limited by the lack of a proper light source. With the construction of the first laser in 1960, this was no longer a problem, and further work developed a two-dimensional means of representing the full depth of an object along with its relative brightness. The first exhibition of holography-as-art took place at the beginning of this decade.

Gallery 1134 is showing more than 40 holograms, equally divided into "historical" and "artistic" categories. By now there are several different holographic varieties, but common to each is the same sense of depth that gives the impression of encountering a wall relief or piece of sculpture.

Because of the extreme technological expense, most artists have not had the opportunity to work with the most refined equipment; therefore, polish is less an issue than sheer invention. But even on this level, all of the pieces disappoint.

Their content often reminds us of 3-D movies, for holography is thus far an art of "special effects" whose creation has not been determined by any far-reaching esthetic purpose. We are still being dazzled by only the most elementary possibilities open to the medium.

With few exceptions, the holograms on

view are devoted to realistic representation. There are portraits, both static and kinetic; still-lives of various sorts; and even some artificial landscapes resembling dioramas. None of them affects us to the same degree as would first-rate examples done in more traditional media, though there is, of course, an implicit glorification of technology which doubtless has accounted for part of the acceptance in Soviet countries.

Furthermore, my limited imagination does not yield many holographic possibilities that would effectively transcend that "miracle of science" status. Full-scale photographs of sculptural masterpieces may one day be processed holographically, putting "The Pieta" into every suburban living room or "The Burgers of Calais" onto downtown plazas. The art world always has allowed for reproductive travesty.

But even on a more serious level, there is still holography's indebtedness to other art forms. Its sense of depth gives greater presence, yes; but there is no expressive or intellectual language yet imagined which a hologram could make importantly its own. Technology provides the means and imperatives. We humans lag behind, tied to "traditional" experience.

Of course, if we believe the literature of the 1970s — Anatole Broyard has called it the literature of "potential man" — a brave new world us just around the corner. But until it is firmly established, holography will continue to perform its one spatial variation on some of the most traditional art forms of all. That is hardly enough to justify the revolutionary rhetoric.

This is the time, however, to begin learning about the medium; and the current exhibition — including two laser installations — is as complete a survey as any we will soon see. It officially inaugurates Gallery 1134's "holographic research center" which, according to director Loren Billings, will provide artists with the equipment for future experimentation. Dr. T.H. Jeong of Lake Forest College already has lectured on the subject; and more shows, done in cooperation with New York's new Museum of Holography, are also promised. The present one continues through July 3.

